



# Glimpses from the General Chapter



November 6-24, 2023  
Thú Duc, Vietnam

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## Glimpse 7 – The Important Work of the Congregation, Commissions and the Steps We Take for Our Life & Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults – November 14-18, 2023

After our retreat day, we returned to the work that had been done to prepare us for the Chapter. Many commissions and committees worked in various areas based on the requests from the Amplified General Council Zoom Meeting in 2021 (AGC). Several needs were requested to be analyzed, procedures developed, and our initial and ongoing formation were improved. The AGC is a “between General Chapter meeting” between the General Council and the different provincials and regional superiors worldwide. Our current **Vicar General José Antonio Rivera Ruiz** (*Spain – South Europe*) gave several reports this Tuesday. He led the Commission of Studies on the Founder and his Work (CEFO). This commission met four times in the last six years. Members of the Eymardian family are represented on CEFO. The members



worked on finding specific quotes about Eymard on the Eucharist and forms of prayer. They produce different pamphlets and books on themes found in the writings of Father Eymard. A recent book on the Counsels of Eymard is an example. CEFO came up with a three-year formation program for studies on Eymard. Other topics are proposed for the future if the chapter votes for CEFO to proceed. Also, we heard a report on the Eymardian Places in France on Tuesday morning. **[Reminder! Sign up for the pilgrimage to enjoy the Eymardian Places in November 2024 for yourself: [ssscommunications@blessedsacrament.com](mailto:ssscommunications@blessedsacrament.com)]**

**On Tuesday afternoon**, we spent time on a new procedural document for **Internationality** by Superior **General Eugenio Martins Barbosa SSS (Brazil)**. He read to us his report where he said:

The last few General Chapters have helped us understand and welcome the reality of internationality as a dynamic of sharing cultures, spiritualities, languages, and knowledge in tune with our globalized world. As Sacramentinos, we experience the Internationality of our Family as an expression of Eucharistic Spirituality. Internationality among us is not a characteristic of the present moment. It was strongly experienced during the expansion of the Congregation in the golden age of our presence in Europe, North America, and Australia. The novelty of the present moment lies in the reverse flow. From what were then called “mission lands,” new missionaries are being sent to countries that we identify economically as the *global north*.

We reviewed revised procedures for sharing our personnel resources across the globe. We are blessed to have ten international religious in the Province of Saint Ann, and their presence was made possible by a previous document on Internationality. This newly updated procedure is extensive and will guide provinces in the future reality of our Internationality and intracultural communities.

**Wednesday morning**, we listened to **Agostinho Maholele SSS (General Council from Mozambique)** and his summary of the work of the **International Formation Commission** and the initial and ongoing formation work that is going on throughout



the Congregation. Maho SSS spent time discussing the overseas formation programs throughout the Congregation.

**The afternoon** was devoted to the updated 62-page *Vade-mecum* given to us to study beforehand. **Joseph Binh, General Secretary (Vietnam)**, provided the context: between 2017 and the last General Chapter, Pope Francis called a meeting of all religious order leaders and heads of bishops' conference to come to the Vatican to report from its Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith a critical document, a *Vademecum*, a document for life "on the way" in religious life and the diocesan Church. Both our order and other religious orders and dioceses are called to implement and follow specific procedures, especially concerning inappropriate sexual behavior and abuse against minors and vulnerable adults.

A *Vademecum* (from the Latin verb *vadere*, meaning "to go") has already been used in our worldwide Congregation. However, in light of 6 years of historical realities and the Dicastery's updates, a team of specialists gathered last February, including our very own **John Keenan (Highland Heights, Ohio)**, to develop a separate piece of the manual or guidebook on sexual abuse. The *Vademecum* adequately and appropriately compressed procedures to be carried out for constant consultation and reference. It is presumed, therefore, that this guidebook will be used only when there is a case brought out and filed against our religious who allegedly committed a crime of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.

This manual contains **three major parts**: the Substantive norms, Procedural norms, and Formularies. The first part, "Substantive Norm," will contain all laws in effect in the Church about the delict of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults reserved to the DDF; the second part, "Procedural Norm," will provide the process of handling cases of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, and the last part will provide "Formularies," samples of forms, letters, and related documents to be accomplished in carrying out the process.

Members of the Chapter agreed that as far as prevention is concerned, it is a small part but a very important one for the Congregation. Because if we don't want to continue to have to deal with situations of sexual abuse, we have to prevent them before they happen to us. The Congregation takes prevention, education, and



ongoing formation seriously, and we were to keep sharing this information with our provinces. It is compulsory to apply this instrument as soon as it is approved by this Chapter for international usage in places where provinces or diocesan conferences have not completed the task. These procedures have been in place in the USA, Canada, UK, Ireland, and Australia **for quite some time**. Our province was even certified in 2022 for compliance with Praesidium. We all agreed that the canonical norms and legislation of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament regarding the protection of minors and vulnerable persons must be scrupulously respected.

The policies and procedures contained in these guidelines are intended to establish and maintain a community, region, and province that is respectful and aware of the rights and needs of minors and vulnerable persons, attentive to the risks of exploitation, sexual abuse, and mistreatment, in the context of the activities carried out within the pastoral actions of the congregation. **The *Vademecum* guidelines are aimed at:**

- Religious of the Blessed Sacrament;
- Associates of the Blessed Sacrament;
- Collaborators of the religious of the Blessed Sacrament;
- Lay people in the institutions under the tutelage of the religious of the Blessed Sacrament, in catechetical ministry, and schools;
- All those who, in any capacity, individual or associated, work within the ecclesial community under the tutelage of the religious of the Blessed Sacrament.

Once the General Chapter approves, we will share it with our membership. These are serious procedures, and we must let you know that we take these realities very seriously as a religious institute. This is why we spent an entire afternoon reading, reviewing, discussing, and questioning this update *Vademecum*.

**We began the morning on Thursday, November 16**, with our usual Morning Prayer and Eucharist combined. Still, especially, we honored our Congregation members who have died in the last six years from around the globe.

Then **Joseph Binh, General Secretary (Vietnam)**, reviewed proposals for updating our *Rule of Life* and General Statutes. The first part concerned making amendments that apply Pope Francis' new document **to allow religious brothers to hold**



**positions of “authority”** or leadership within religious orders. Previously, many positions were only allowed to be held by priests. Many other religious orders, like ourselves, have had brothers in leadership positions but need approval from the Vatican to hold these positions. (As some know, this is an extra step formally called an “indult” to relax the law for a particular reason.) If you thought Canon Law would be a fun discussion, you would have enjoyed the hours on this and the time of study about it. We even did some Yoga between the sessions to relax and help us concentrate more on these juridical matters. We even prayed that the Holy Spirit guide us with our changes and how we govern ourselves in relations to the Church. I am not sharing the proposals because they **are just proposals**. Once the Chapter’s Juridical Commission reviews our comments and issues, they will make a final proposal for us to be able to vote upon later in the Chapter. **Stay tuned for the realities that will be our future!**

The last part of the afternoon gave our first report from the “**Memory and Discernment Commission**,” which captures the spirit, words, and meanings of the Chapter and proposes a final mission statement that we will vote upon in the last hours of the Chapter and share with you as we go forth to live our next mission statement for the next six years.

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**Friday morning began at 6 AM with the first part of the discernment for a new General Superior** and his team (a treasurer and three other consultants who usually represent the order from around the world). We pray in the Holy Spirit with special votive readings and songs and in the context of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. **Jean Ratté** (*Canada – the assigned person for the day*) and I (*assigned musician*) led the hour-long prayer.

**After breakfast**, we had a report from the “**Memory and Discernment**” Commission. They are capturing the chapter highlights and letting us know what they are hearing that will become, as mentioned above, the final document to share with the world about our mission. It was a powerful first draft text; additional suggestions have strengthened the work.

Next, the **Juridical Commission** presented all the submitted proposals and matters for updating our *Rule of Life* and General Statutes. They received a lot of questions for clarification, feedback, and more information to take back to their commission for review and alteration. Two pieces came from our province concerning the election process and removing the most sacred name of God, YHWH, that Jews and





Christians are not to say from our **Rule of Life 14**. (This included a brief history of the work, which you may wish to look up on the internet, too.) This commission will later next week present the final 30 texts that we will vote upon next week.

Three other commissions in the afternoon gave their reports from the discussion and discernment they received during our open forums and group work. I summarized these three commissions earlier, but they continue essential work for the Congregation. They are, again, the **Commission for Eymardian Writings, the International Theological Commission, and the Formation Commission**. As mentioned, these groups have been meeting in the evening, sometimes until 10:00 – 11:00 PM. Luckily, most take a siesta from 12:30 – 2:30 pm each day while I take some time to walk the neighborhood (you've seen the pics!) and do some of these *Glimpses* and *Pastoral Letters*.

Lastly, the second part of the election of the Superior General, a time of discernment and surfacing of names for the office/position, occurred later in the afternoon. After hearing all the reports, the capitulars consider, as the document says for the procedures, “who, before God, would be most capable of carrying out this service. During this phase, the capitulars suggested names.” We left the chapter hall **in silence** to ponder the names and traits we need now in our history for leadership. At this time, those nominated do not express whether they accept or refuse candidature for election.

At the **Saturday Morning Eucharist with Morning Prayer, Marcello Da Silva (Brazil)** and Francisco Junior Marquez (Brazil) preached the homily. We were blessed with the **SSS Vietnam** Scholastic choir again leading us in the music.

After **Saturday breakfast**, we took a “straw vote,” with ballots counted and read aloud before the Chapter. The names that surfaced were:

**Straw Vote – Capitulars Vote for no more than 3 candidates on their ballot:**

- |                         |    |                           |    |
|-------------------------|----|---------------------------|----|
| • Philip Benzy Romician | 14 | • Jose Antonio Rivera     | 11 |
| • Roel de la Cruz       | 1  | • Sagara Jaymanne         | 3  |
| • John Thomas Lane      | 18 | • Anaclet Bambala         | 3  |
| • Dilan Fernando        | 4  | • Eugenio Barbosa Martins | 5  |
| • Justin Chawkan        | 16 | • Maurits Gijsbrechts     | 4  |
| • Manuel Barberio       | 2  | • Luca Zanchi             | 5  |



- Eugene Van Heijst            2
  - Tan Tran Ngoc                1
  - Joseph Binh Vu Quoc        2
  - Vergel Dalangin             3
  - Francisco Marques          2
- Rizieri Santi                 1
  - Yves Maxim Sagna         1
  - Gabriele Di Nicolo         1
  - Agostinho Maholele        1

Then, a **dialogue between the candidates** and the rest of the Chapter to offer the possibility for better reciprocal knowledge. We pray for our discernment and ask for your prayerful consideration. Let me know what you think about my candidacy, and share with me in email your thoughts. The vote for General Superior is Monday, November 20, at 8:00 am Vietnam time (*Twelve hours ahead of Eastern Time.*) Several of the capitulars voted for withdrew their names for various reasons, since this was allowed, including, Jose Antonio, Eugenio, Sagara, Luca, Roel, Anaclet, Joseph Binh, Rizieri, Gabriele and Francisco.



Myself with our current General Superior Father Eugenio Barbosa Martins (*Brazil*)



Another delegate from Mozambique- Fr Ago has served on the General Council too in the area of Formation





Senegal and Congo delegates. We are happy when we are on a break from the reports!



Benediction with Father Felix from Mozambique



Delegates from Columbia, Italy (2) and Spain (L-R)



Brazil leads the morning worship







Our mini choir sings for the services



Scrutineers count our votes



Talk about wires getting crossed!



Prayer to the Holy Spirit for discernment of new General Council





The Eymardian Family



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Panel of two Aggregation leaders, Servitium Christi and Servants



Group 1 posing for a photo after group work



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Sister Teresa Dinh Thi Anh Dao SSS (*Vicar General from Vietnam*)



Mary Keene of Servitium Christi



Break with the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament leaders







Lunch together



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